

Lexington Herald-Leader

Saturday, May 30, 2009

## **Teacher, 105, gets honorary doctorate**

Author: WILLIAM CROYLE THE KENTUCKY ENQUIRER

WILLIAMSTOWN - It took Della Jones 17 summers and years of battling segregation to finally earn her degree in 1957 from Kentucky State University at the age of 53.

She did it by having the same attitude as Martin Luther King Jr., who spoke at her commencement.

"He talked about having a dream and working toward that dream," said Jones, a former **teacher** in Boone and Owen counties. "I always tried to do that, and I always told the children I taught to set what they wanted to do in life and work toward it."

On May 10, at **105** years old, Jones was honored by KSU with an **honorary doctorate** degree during the school's commencement ceremony.

Since she was unable to attend because of physical limitations, representatives from the school brought the degree to her at the Grant Manor Rehabilitation & Nursing Center a few days later.

"She was chosen because of her contributions to education, continued perseverance toward earning her degree and contributions to all the young men and women she taught from all backgrounds," said KSU Interim Provost James Chapman.

Though her sight and hearing are deteriorating, Jones' mind is as sharp as ever.

Until heart complications last month, she lived alone. She insists that her stay at the nursing center is temporary.

"Old age is hard, but you just cope and go on," Jones said. "I'm always an optimistic person. I pray every day that the Lord will make me better and **get** me home."

Jones was born in Williamstown in 1903. As a black woman, she experienced segregation throughout her life while a student and **teacher**. She could teach only at all-black schools since blacks weren't allowed to teach white students.

"Segregation was a terrible thing," Jones said. "I can remember wanting to go to the public library, but I couldn't because my face was black. I remember having to walk to school as a **teacher** because we weren't allowed to ride the buses."

Afraid of "becoming an old maid," she left teaching to **get** married to her sweetheart of 10 years, Bradley Jones, and raise their daughter, Pauline, whom they adopted when she was 2 years old.

Jones went back to teaching in the early 1940s and stayed for 30 years - most of it in segregated schools, and the last few years in integrated schools. She retired in 1974.

Jones will turn 106 on July 7. When asked her secret to longevity, Jones said she never drank, never smoked and "lived as close to the Lord as I could, but I wouldn't call that a secret," she said.